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ABSTRACT

A study examined the "Summer Opportunity to Accelerate Reading" (S.O.A.R.) program, which provided early intervention to accelerate literacy learning for at-risk students entering grades 1-3 in the fall of 1998. Subjects were 388 students enrolled in 3 S.O.A.R. campuses from 37 Austin Independent School District (AISD) elementary schools and 4 private schools. Ethnicity was diverse with 47% Hispanic Americans, 37% Blacks, 16% Anglo Americans and others, and 1% American Indians. Forty-five teachers from 22 AISD campuses taught in this balanced literacy program, which included reading aloud, shared reading, word study, guided reading, independent reading, and writer's workshops. Results indicated that 85% of all students showed improvement by advancing one or more reading levels, and students at grade 2 showed the greatest mean gain in both level and stage. Recommendations include continuing the program the next summer, lengthening the program to 6 weeks, enforcing a stricter enrollment policy, increasing the emphasis districtwide on balanced literacy by offering professional development for teachers, and using S.O.A.R. teachers to train other teachers in balanced reading so they can use the strategies in their classrooms. (Contains 6 figures, 3 tables of data, and 24 references; appendixes contain survey and interview instruments, textbook leveling correlations, S.O.A.R. daily schedule, and a summer school materials list.) (CR)

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Summer Opportunity to Accelerate Reading (S.O.A.R.) Evaluation, 1998

Austin Independent School District
Office of Program Evaluation

August 1998

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Summer Opportunity to Accelerate Reading (S.O.A.R.) Evaluation, 1998
Executive Summary

Austin Independent School District
Office of Program Evaluation

Authors: Janice Curry and Gloria Zyskowski, Ph.D.

Program Description

The goal of the 1997-98 Title I summer school, S.O.A.R. *(Summer Opportunity to Accelerate Reading)*, was to provide early intervention to accelerate literacy learning for students entering grades 1-3 in the fall of 1998. This program originated in response to the district and state goal of ensuring that all children will read on or above grade level by the end of the third grade.

S.O.A.R. was held at three schools (Jordan, Oak Springs, and Palm) from June 8-July 2, 1998. A student was eligible to attend if he or she was at risk of being retained or was below grade-level in literacy skills, and was recommended by a teacher or principal.

The summer school program was free to Title I students meeting any of these criteria. Other AISD students who met the eligibility requirements for the program but who did not attend a Title I school could participate in the summer program by paying a fee. Each S.O.A.R. campus was assigned a staff consisting of a principal, certified teachers, a librarian, a parent training specialist, monitors, and a secretary.

The S.O.A.R. program used a balanced literacy approach to reading instruction. Elements of a balanced reading program include read aloud, shared reading, word study, guided reading, independent reading, and writer's workshop. Instructional materials specifically designed to complement individual reading levels were used in this intensive 19-day summer program. The student-teacher ratio was expected to be 15:1 on each campus. All teachers who participated in the program were required to attend two days of professional development to train them in running records, the assessment instrument (Developmental Reading Assessment), and strategies to improve reading skills.

Evaluation Design

The Title I evaluation staff collaborated with teachers, site principals, and the program director to gather data concerning various aspects of the S.O.A.R. program. Information about program goals, curriculum, and staff training was gathered from the program director and the curriculum specialist. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected at each campus at the end of the 19-day program. For assessment purposes the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) was used to determine a pre- and post-level of reading

Major Findings

A total of 388 students were enrolled at the three S.O.A.R. campuses. Students from 37 AISD elementary schools (21 Title I and 16 non-Title I) and 4 private schools participated in the program. The ethnicity was diverse with 47% Hispanic, 37% African American, 16% Anglo/Other, and 1% American Indian. Forty-five teachers from 22 AISD campuses taught in this balanced literacy program.

Attendance

- The average daily attendance for the S.O.A.R. program was 354 students.
- The average number of days each student was in attendance was 16.3. Twenty-seven percent of students attended all 19 days of the program.
- The preregistration enrollment totaled 619 students, which indicated that an estimated 35% of the students registered for S.O.A.R. did not attend.

Assessment

The DRA uses specially selected assessment texts that represent a range of difficulty (20 texts from Level A through 44). The running record is administered as the pre- and posttest to determine reading level.

- During the four-week program, 85% of all students with valid pre- and posttest scores (n=366) showed improvement by advancing one or more reading levels on the DRA.
- Only 56 students (15%) remained at the emergent level. Thirty of the 45 students who began at the lowest level (Level A) advanced to a higher level within the emergent level of reading.
- Of the 85 students who posttested in the early stage of reading, 30 (35%) advanced from the emergent stage.
- Of the 65 students who posttested in the transitional stage of reading, 32 (49%) advanced from the early stage.
- Of the 33 students who posttested in the extending stage of reading, 3 (9%) advanced from early stage, 15 (45%) advanced from transitional, and 15 (45%) began in the extending stage of reading.
- Attending at least 17 days of the S.O.A.R. program had a positive effect on student achievement. When looking at all students, regardless of the number of days of attendance, the average gain was 1.9 levels, compared with an average gain of 2.03 levels for students who attended at least 17 days. A similar pattern was seen in terms of the average stage gains. However, because the average attendance rate overall was 16.3 days, the achievement differences between all students and those with at least 17 days of attendance would be expected to be similar.
- When scores were examined by grade, students at Grade 2 showed the greatest mean gain in both level and stage. The mean gain in

levels was 2.4 and the mean gain in stages was 0.5 for grade 2.

Survey and Interviews

Teachers were asked to respond to a survey about the S.O.A.R. program. The principal of each campus and three teachers (one from each grade level) were interviewed.

- Teachers expressed strong support for the balanced literacy approach to reading and indicated their willingness to use the strategies learned from the program when they return to their regular campuses.
- In terms of the training provided to teachers, the principals agreed that the sessions were valuable but that more modeling of classroom behavior would have been helpful.
- The teachers were generally pleased with the amount and quality of materials available to them for teaching reading. However, some first-grade teachers said that there were not enough materials to promote phonemic awareness skills for non-readers.
- Because the DRA was very time-consuming, many of the teachers suggested assessing students with the DRA prior to the beginning of summer school to *"maximize instruction time."*

Recommendations

As a result of reviewing the evaluation findings, these recommendations concerning the S.O.A.R. program are offered for consideration:

- Continue S.O.A.R. next summer and incorporate elements of the balanced literacy approach into regular classroom teaching throughout the year.
- Lengthen the program to 6 weeks to maximize the benefits of instruction during the summer break.
- Maintain a low teacher-pupil ratio for the summer classes.
- Enforce a stricter enrollment policy for students, one that stresses the eligibility requirements for the program and the importance of daily attendance.
- Purchase additional materials that better meet the needs of pre-reading students.
- Increase the emphasis districtwide on balanced literacy as an approach to teaching reading by offering professional development for teachers.
- Recruit teachers for the summer program who are likely to use the balanced literacy training in their classrooms during the school year.
- Recruit site principals for the program who are knowledgeable in balanced literacy and the mechanics of running a school.
- Use S.O.A.R. teachers to train other teachers in balanced reading so they can use the strategies in their classrooms.
- Increase the length of the training required of teachers before the summer program.
- Assess reading levels of program participants with the DRA before the summer program begins.
- Continue to monitor achievement in future summer programs.

1997-98 S.O.A.R. Budget

The S.O.A.R. program was funded with Title I funds. Budget allocations totaled $487,620.

Payroll Costs	$250,000
Supplies and Materials	$237,620

Program Staff

Terry Ross, S.O.A.R. Coordinator; Team Leader-Language Arts

Kathryn McKenzie, S.O.A.R. Curriculum Specialist

Kathryn Stone, S.O.A.R. Facilitator

Alicia Moore, Jordan Principal

Ben Kramer, Oak Springs Principal

Lisa Robertson, Palm Principal

Debi Hyatt, Support Staff

Gayle Short, Support Staff

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Introduction

Summer Opportunity to Accelerate Reading (S.O.A.R.)

Program Description

The goal of the 1997-98 Title I summer school, S.O.A.R. *(Summer Opportunity to Accelerate Reading)*, was to provide early intervention to accelerate literacy learning for students entering grades 1-3 in the fall of 1998. This program originated in response to the district and state goal of insuring that all children will read on grade level by the end of the third grade.

S.O.A.R. was held at three schools (Jordan, Oak Springs, and Palm) from June 8-July 2, 1998. A student was eligible to attend if he or she was at risk of being retained or was below grade-level in literacy skills, and was recommended by a teacher or principal.

The summer school program was free to Title I students meeting any of these criteria. Other AISD students who met the eligibility requirements for the program but who did not attend a Title I school could participate in the summer program by paying a fee. Each S.O.A.R. campus was assigned a staff consisting of a principal, certified teachers, a librarian, a parent training specialist, monitors, and a secretary.

The S.O.A.R. program used a balanced literacy approach to reading instruction. Elements of a balanced reading program include read aloud, shared reading, word study, guided reading, independent reading, and writer's workshop. Instructional materials specifically designed to complement individual reading levels were used in this intensive 19-day summer program. The student-teacher ratio was expected to be 15:1 on each campus. All teachers who participated in the program were required to attend two days of professional development to train them in running records, the assessment instrument (Developmental Reading Assessment), and strategies to improve reading skills.

The S.O.A.R. program was funded with Title I funds. Budget allocations consisted of $487,620, used for payroll costs ($250,00) and supplies and materials ($237,620).

The Title I evaluation staff was asked to evaluate this summer school pilot program. A description of the evaluation design, a literature review, and program outcomes will be discussed in the following sections of this report.

Evaluation Design

With the assistance of Terry Ross, the S.O.A.R. program director, the Title I evaluation staff designed a plan for evaluating the summer reading program that would examine the effectiveness of the balanced literacy approach to improve reading skills in program participants. In addition, the effectiveness of the training program provided to S.O.A.R. teachers was investigated.

The Title I evaluation staff collaborated with teachers, site principals, and the program director to gather data concerning various aspects of the S.O.A.R. program. Information about program goals, curriculum, and staff training was gathered from the program director and the curriculum specialist. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected at each campus at the end of the 19-day program.

Student data collected at the campus level included name, identification number, home school, days in attendance, and a pre- and post-level of reading as measured by the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). Information from classroom observations was used to supplement the achievement data that were reported at the end of the program.

The Title I evaluation staff attended the teacher training sessions and followed up on the information presented to them with site visits and classroom observations at the three summer school campuses. During the site visits, the evaluation staff interviewed each site principal to get more detailed impressions of the program and how it worked at specific sites. All teachers at the S.O.A.R. campuses were asked to complete individual, multiple-choice surveys. The survey addressed the general level of staff preparedness for the summer program as a result of the specific training they were offered. In addition, each principal was asked to select at least three teachers to be interviewed by the evaluation staff for a more in-depth look at teacher perceptions of the program. Results of the principal and teacher interviews and the teacher surveys are included in separate sections of this report. Copies of the interview and survey instruments are included in Appendix A.

Review of Reading Instruction Literature

According to most educators, there is no other skill taught in school that is more important than reading. It is the gateway to all other knowledge. If children do not learn to read efficiently, the path is blocked to every subject they encounter in their school years (National Center to Improve the Tools of Educators, 1996).

The reading process is complex. According to M.R. Ruddell (1993), *"Reading is the act of constructing meaning while interacting with text. The reader makes meaning through the combination of prior knowledge and previous experience, information available in text, and the stance he or she takes in relationship to the text. Constructed meaning is further shaped through social interaction and communication."* Reading instruction builds on oral language. If that foundation is weak, progress in reading will be slow and uncertain (Blachman, 1991).

The past decade has brought major breakthroughs in the knowledge of how children learn to read and why so many fail (Snow et al., 1998). For most children, learning to read is a natural process. However, for too many children, learning to read is difficult and is associated with present and future difficulties. Children who do not learn to read well in the first and second grades are likely to struggle with reading throughout their lives (National Center to Improve the Tools of Educators, 1996). Teaching students to read by the end of the third grade is the single most important task assigned to our schools. Starting in fourth grade, schooling takes on a different purpose, one that is more complex and that demands higher-order thinking skills. Without efficient reading skills the English language, history, mathematics, current events, and the enriching experiences of literature and science become inaccessible to students.

History of Whole Language vs. Phonics

The way American schools teach children to read and write has, for many years, been under the divergent influences of two powerful schools of thought. The two camps, whole language and phonics, have been competing with each other for over 30 years (Murray, 1995).

The traditional theory of learning to read, which began in the 19th century, is that children learn a complex skill like reading by making sense of the smallest components of the language (letters) and then progressing to larger components (sounds, words, and sentences) (*Education Week*, 1998). Children learn to read by learning to decode the language. This process begins with a focus on phonics (first sounding out letters, then combining letters), tightly controlled vocabulary, and short basal (or basic) reading passages, followed by numerous skills exercises, each with only one correct answer.

The whole-language theory holds that learning to read and write English is like learning to speak it – a natural, unconscious process best fostered by unstructured immersion (Lemann, 1997). One of the central beliefs of whole language (also known as "look-say" or "sight reading") is that language should be learned from whole-to-part with word-recognition skills being picked up by the child in the context of reading, writing, and immersion in a print-rich classroom (Levine, 1994). The whole-language approach stresses reading of children's literature rather than basal readers, offers a supportive and tolerant atmosphere for learning to read, and emphasizes early writing to improve reading and thinking skills.

Although the current whole-language movement began in the early 1970s, the dispute about reading instruction began much earlier. In the mid-nineteenth century, Horace Mann challenged the use of phonics as the traditional method of teaching reading (Levine, 1994). He supported the "look-say" method that came to dominate American education during the progressive education movement in the 1920s. However, in the 1950s, the meaning-first approach was denounced in the best seller by Rudolph Flesch, *Why Johnny Can't Read*, and the pendulum swung back to phonics (Levine, 1994).

By the early 1970s, most schools had returned to a phonics-based program. Then, as these programs began to be criticized by some teachers and academics as *"killing off children's interest in reading"* through the use of worksheets, basal readers, and ability reading groups, support for whole-language resurfaced (Levine, 1994). Research by Marie Carbo in 1987 found that for most children, it is harder to learn phonics from part-to-whole (phonics first) than from whole-to-part (reading and writing first with phonics from words in familiar texts). The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), the International Reading Association (IRA), and numerous teacher groups support whole-language reading instruction (Levine, 1994).

The whole-language philosophy gained widespread acceptance in California in 1987 when the state education department incorporated it into the state's English/language-arts framework with the approval of whole-language based textbooks in grades K-8 (Diegmueller, 1996). However, California policymakers reversed their stand after the reading scores from the 1994 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) showed that 59 percent of the state's fourth-graders read below the basic level; only one state scored lower. With passage of the "ABC" law, California legislators now require state officials to give adequate attention to phonics in instructional materials (Diegmueller, 1996).

Which of these philosophies of reading instruction will win out? Many educators believe that the current debate concerning the "best" approach to teaching reading will ultimately lead to a healthy balance between the two approaches, blending the *"best of both worlds"* (Diegmueller, 1996). Research strongly indicates that students will be the most successful if a balanced approach is used – teach phonics in a systematic fashion within the context of real stories (*Education Week*, 1998).

The Balanced Reading Approach

The problems many children encounter in learning to read could be prevented with excellent instruction and an early exposure to language skills and rich literature, according to a report by the National Research Council (NRC), *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (1998). The NRC, which studied a wide range of reading research over the past two years, called for an end to the "reading wars" that have divided educators, researchers, and lawmakers with opposing views of how children should learn to read. This well-received report recommends that children learn to read through explicit phonics instruction and by sounding out unfamiliar words, but it also urges daily exposure to literature and attention to comprehension. The teaching of reading, according to the NRC, must encompass an integration of techniques that develop phonemic awareness, reading fluency, and comprehension throughout early childhood, and cannot rely on one method of instruction. The best practice combines *"immersing children in rich language by reading to them and providing access to a variety of texts, while explicitly and*

systematically teaching them the sounds and their symbols and connecting these to decodable texts" (Adams, 1990).

The current changes in the approach to teaching reading have left teachers with the dilemma of providing young readers with materials and instruction that fit their individual levels of development. Teachers must assess reading level so that the books children read will offer just enough challenge to support problem solving, but be easy enough to support fluency and meaning (Fountas and Pinnell, 1995).

The components of a balanced literacy program are defined in the research-based Ohio State University Early Literacy Learning Initiative developed in 1984 (Fountas, 1995). A balanced language arts program includes a combination, or balance, of the following components, which together comprise a daily reading/language instructional program:

- *Reading Aloud to Children.* Throughout the day the teacher reads to students a variety of quality literature – fiction, nonfiction and poetry. By reading to the students, the teacher models fluent, expressive reading and shares an enthusiasm for books. Reading aloud is seen as the single most influential factor in the young child's success in learning to read.
- *Shared Reading.* During shared reading, the teacher and students read together from a big book, or other enlarged text such as group-produced projects and experience charts. During shared reading, students learn concepts about print, vocabulary in context, and other reading skills.
- *Guided Reading.* Guided reading provides the opportunity to work with small groups on books that present a challenge. From careful observations and assessment, the teacher determines which book would be at an appropriate level for each child. Groupings remain flexible so that students can move ahead as quickly as possible. According to Regie Routman (*Invitations*, 1991), *"Guided reading is the heart of the instructional reading program."*
- *Independent Reading.* Children read on their own or with partners from a wide range of materials. Voluntary self-selected reading is critical to the reading program.
- *Shared Writing.* The teacher and students work together to compose messages and stories. The teacher supports the process as scribe.
- *Interactive Writing.* Similar to shared writing, but stories are written using a "shared pen" technique that involves children in the writing.
- *Guided Writing or Writing Workshop.* During guided writing, the teacher serves as a facilitator and guide to an individual or a small group of students.
- *Independent Writing.* It is important to provide many opportunities throughout the day for students to engage in independent writing activities, such as journal entry or a new version of a familiar story.

One promising program, Reading Recovery, is embraced by both phonics and whole-language advocates as an effective reading program (Levine, 1994). Reading Recovery combines quick, accessible phonics instruction with whole-language activities. The early reading intervention effort, designed by Marie Clay, began as a nationwide program in New Zealand in 1979 (Pinnell, et al., 1988).

Implications for Instruction

In *Preventing Failure in Early Reading Programs* (1998), Bill Honig states that one of the most important breakthroughs in reading research in the past decades is how important being able to hear and manipulate the discreet sound parts of words – phonemic awareness – is to learning to read. Most children acquire basic phonemic awareness in kindergarten by such activities as rhyming and sound word games. According to Honig, about one sixth of our children have *"phonological wiring"* problems, and without special assistance from mid-kindergarten on will not acquire basic phonemic awareness. Many of these students will end up in special education or remedial programs because they were not properly taught initially. The implication is that kindergarten programs must identify and assist those children who will have an extremely difficult time learning to read without intervention.

Disadvantaged children coming from literature-poor homes will most likely need explicit instruction (Murray, 1995). Research by Barbara Foorman of economically disadvantaged second and third graders shows that students with low phonemic awareness suffer in whole-language classrooms and stay at the bottom of the class. *"Whole language fuels good readers, but shortchanges poor readers,"* said Dr. Foorman. Estimates are that only one out of eight children not reading on grade-level by the end of first grade will ever read grade-appropriate materials without extensive and well-designed intervention programs (Honig, 1996).

The Houston Independent School District, where 65 percent of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches, has taken an *"almost militaristic stand in addressing the teaching of reading"* (Manzo, 1998). After using the whole-language approach in Houston schools for a decade, a balanced approach to reading initiative was implemented. When the 1998 Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) scores were released, Houston schools showed that 85 percent of third graders, 89 percent of fourth graders, and 88 percent of fifth graders had met at least the minimum standards on the reading portion of the test. Fourth graders have improved 11 percentage points since 1996, the year before the new mandate went into effect.

To promote reading success for all children, teachers will need to be highly skilled in reading techniques and strategies (Manzo and Sack, 1997). Extensive teacher training is essential to children learning to read. Most elementary teachers have little formal training in the structure of the language and in how children learn to read. According to Robert Slavin, a researcher at Johns Hopkins University and creator of Success for All, *"In a sense, there is an enormous retooling job to be done to bring teachers of beginning reading up to the current conception"* of how to teach reading (Manzo and Sack, 1997). According to Fountas and Pinnell (1995), *"Good teaching is the foundation of education and the right of every child."*

Reading Initiatives

Political leaders have responded to poor reading scores by supporting initiatives for improving students' reading skills. Nationwide in 1994, 4% of fourth graders scored at the top level of reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, and 44% scored below *basic* in reading (*Education Week*, March 20, 1996). President Clinton has proposed the *America Reads* program to get students reading on grade level at the end of third grade as defined by their ability to meet the basic level of the NAEP (*Education Week*, September 11, 1996). The Administration proposed legislation that would launch the first nationwide effort to supplement classroom

instruction in reading with high-quality volunteer tutoring, primarily after school, on the weekends, and during summers. According to information available on the *America Reads* website, Congress and the Administration reserved $210 million for a children's reading initiative in the 1998 budget to be allocated to *America Reads* once authorizing legislation passes and is signed into law.

In January 1996, Governor George W. Bush announced his reading initiative for Texas. The goal of the Texas Reading Initiative is for all students to read on grade level by the end of grade 3 and to continue to read on grade level throughout their schooling. To assist school districts and teachers with the information essential to the success of this goal, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) has published a document entitled, *Beginning Reading Instruction*. The document describes the 12 essential components of a research-based reading program along with factors that support effective reading instruction in the classroom and on the campus. The 12 essential components of a successful reading program as reported by TEA state that all children should have opportunities to:

- expand their appreciation for and use of oral language;
- expand their appreciation for and use of printed language;
- hear good stories and informational books read aloud daily;
- understand and use the building blocks of spoken language;
- learn about and use the building blocks of written language;
- learn about the alphabetic principle and about the relationship between the sounds of spoken language and the letters and words of written language;
- learn decoding strategies;
- relate spelling and writing to reading;
- practice accurate and fluent reading in readable, decodable stories;
- develop new vocabulary through wide reading and direct vocabulary instruction;
- read and comprehend a wide assortment of books and other texts; and
- learn comprehension strategies and engage in higher order thinking skills as they reflect upon and discuss what they read.

According to the National Center to Improve the Tools of Educators (1996), reading failure is not concentrated among specific groups of students. Students who have difficulty reading represent a *"virtual cross-section of American children"* including *"rich and poor, male and female, rural and urban, and public and private school children in all sections of the country."* Thirty-two percent of fourth graders whose parents graduated from college read below basic level on the 1994 NAEP. According to the National Research Council (1998), *"children who need additional support for early language and literacy development should receive it as early as possible."*

In Texas, as in the rest of the country, teaching reading presents a great challenge. This quote by Marilyn Haring, dean of Purdue University's School of Education, summarizes the issue: *"Literacy is THE most important skill we teach, and it should be taught early and well. It is the key to every student's future success in school. To help our children achieve the proficiency they need, it is our responsibility to use any proven method available to us."* (*Purdue News*, April 1998)

Data Analyses

Quantitative Data

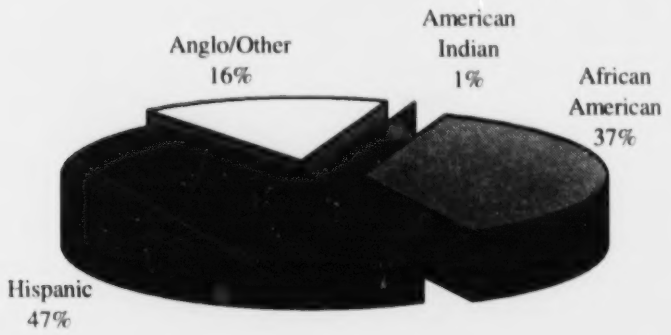
As stated in the program design, this evaluation examined attendance records as well as the reading gains on the DRA. In addition to the analysis of reading gain data for all students, a separate analysis of gains by students attending S.O.A.R. 17 days or more was conducted to determine if number of days in attendance would affect outcomes. This section will summarize S.O.A.R. student and teacher demographics, and attendance and assessment data.

Student Demographics

Students from 37 AISD elementary schools (21 Title I and 16 non-Title I) and 4 private schools participated in the 1998 S.O.A.R. program. Sixty-nine students, who did not attend Title I schools, paid a tuition fee to attend S.O.A.R.

Of the 388 students who attended more than five days, 55% were male and 45% female. The grade distribution was balanced with 25% grade 1, 37% grade 2, and 38% grade 3. The ethnicity was diverse with 47% Hispanic, 37% African American, 16% Anglo/Other, and 1% American Indian. Figure 1 presents the ethnicity for S.O.A.R. students.

Figure 1: Ethnicity for 1998 S.O.A.R. Students

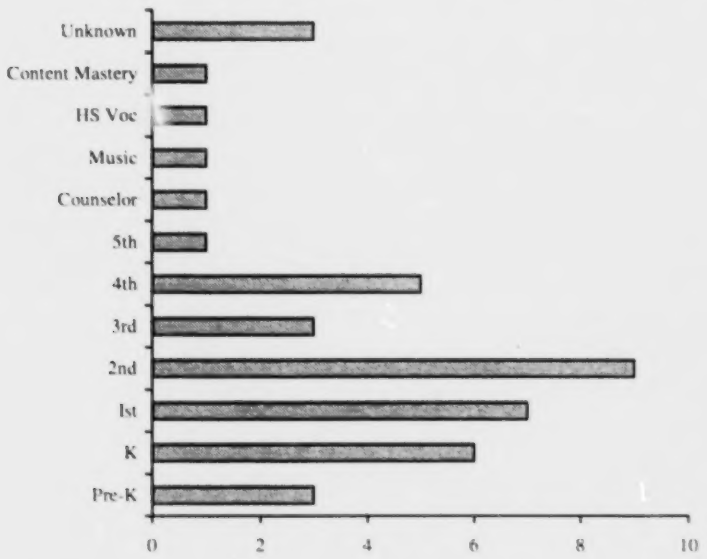


Teacher Demographics

Forty-five teachers taught reading in the S.O.A.R. classrooms. The ethnicity of the teaching staff was not as diverse as for S.O.A.R. students; 57% were Anglo, 23% were African American, and 20% were Hispanic. Only two of the 45 teachers were male.

During the regular school year these teachers teach at 22 different AISD campuses. The majority (93%) of the teachers taught core academic subjects during the 1997-98 school year. Other teachers included an elementary counselor, an elementary music teacher, and a high school vocational teacher. Figure 2 shows the number of teachers by grade or subject taught during the 1997-98 school year.

Figure 2: Number of S.O.A.R. Teachers by Grade or Subject Taught During 1997-98



The majority (45%) of the S.O.A.R. teachers had more than six years of AISD teaching experience. The average number of years of teaching experience with AISD was 8.7 years. The breakdown of experience teaching in AISD is as follows:

- 0-5 years – 20 (45%);
- 6-10 years – 6 (15%);
- 11-20 years – 15 (34%); and
- 20+ years – 3 (7%).

The overall pupil-teacher-ratio was low, with nine students to each teacher. A ratio of 15 students to one teacher was the original program goal.

ATTENDANCE

Because only students who attended five or more days were included in the count, the total number of students used in this evaluation is 388. Nine students were excluded from the total because of a teacher error in recording attendance. An additional four students were recorded as enrolled, but stayed less than five days. The preregistration enrollment totaled 619 students, which indicates that an estimated 35% of the students registered for S.O.A.R. did not attend.

According to records from the three campuses, an average daily attendance for the S.O.A.R. program was 354 students. The highest average daily attendance was 386 and the lowest average attendance was 308. The average daily attendance at Jordan was 141, Oak Springs was 97, and Palm was 116. The average number of days each student was in attendance was 16.3. Twenty-seven percent of the students attended all 19 days of the S.O.A.R. program.

ASSESSMENT

The assessment instrument selected for use in the S.O.A.R. program is the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). The DRA, published by Celebration Press, is designed to provide a method for teachers to assess and document primary students' development as readers over time within a literature-based instructional reading program. The DRA, used with kindergarten through third-grade students, is conducted during a one-on-one reading conference as children read specially selected assessment texts. The procedures used incorporate the work of Dr. Marie Clay, including the use of running records described by her in *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement* (Heinemann 1993).

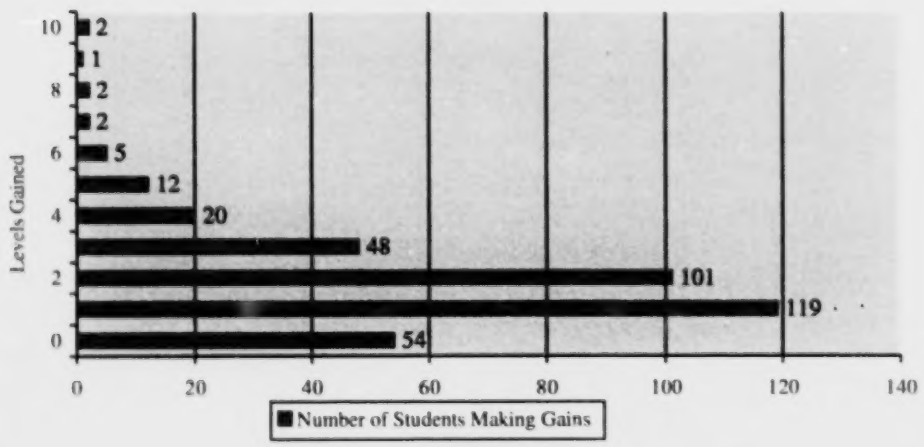
The DRA assessment texts represent a range of reading difficulty (20 texts from Level A through 44). There are four stages of literacy identified by the DRA – emergent (levels A-2), early (levels 3-10), transitional (levels 12-24), and extending (levels 28-44). The running record is administered as the pre- and posttest to determine reading level. See Appendix B for a chart of text book leveling correlations.

Because the summer program was only 19 days long, it was necessary for teachers to assess students' reading levels promptly so that books could be selected for each student and guided reading could begin. Teachers reported using from 2-5 days to do the pretest and less time to complete the posttest.

Increase in Levels

During the four-week S.O.A.R. pilot program, 85% of all students with valid pre- and posttest scores (n=366) showed reading improvement by advancing one or more levels on the DRA. The average gain in levels for all students regardless of the number of days of attendance was 1.9, with a range from zero to ten levels. Figure 3 shows the number of levels advanced and the number of students advancing in each group for all students with pre- and posttest scores.

Figure 3: Number of Levels Gained and the Number of Students in Each Group for All Students with Valid DRA Pre- and Posttest Scores

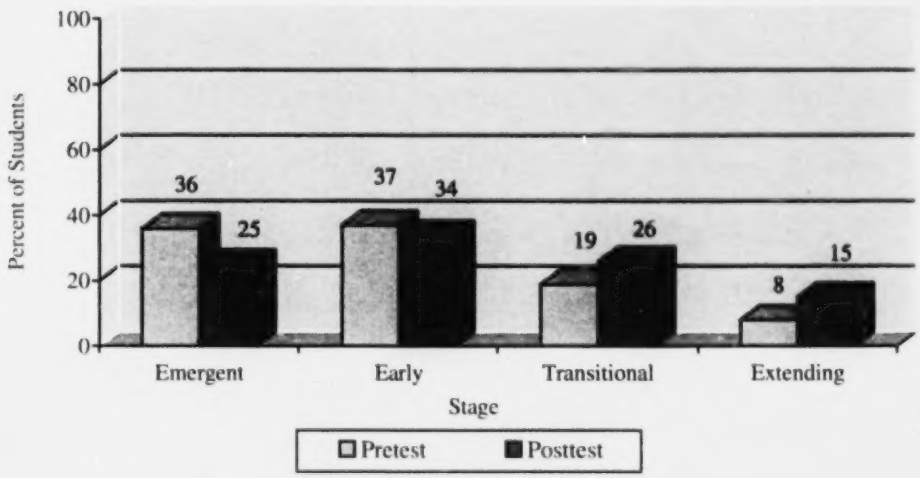


The greatest movement occurred at level A from pretest to posttest. Fifty-two students advanced from the lowest level (A) to a higher level during S.O.A.R.

Increase in Stages

It is more difficult to advance from one stage to another than it is to move from one level to another, especially if the student started at the lowest level in a given stage. In all, 111 students (30%) advanced one or more stages. Figure 4 shows the percent of students at each stage at pretest and posttest. The graph shows that the percentage of students at the two lowest stages (emergent and early) decreased from pretest to posttest, while the percentage of students at the two highest stages (transitional and extending) increased from pretest to posttest, which is evidence of reading gains for S.O.A.R.

Figure 4: Percentage of All Students at Each Pretest and Posttest Stage



Further analysis of the reading assessment data for all students with valid pre- and posttest scores reveals the following information:

- Only 56 (15%) remained at the emergent level. Thirty of the 45 students who began at the lowest level (A) advanced to a higher level within the emergent level of reading.
- Of the 85 students who posttested in the early stage of reading, 30 (35%) advanced from the emergent stage.
- Of the 65 students who posttested in the transitional stage of reading, 32 (49%) advanced from the early stage.
- Of the 33 students who posttested in the extending stage of reading, 3 (9%) advanced from the early stage, 15 (45%) advanced from transitional, and 15 (45%) began in the extending stage of reading.

When scores were examined by grade, it could be seen that Grade 2 had the greatest mean gain in level and in stage. All students with pre- and posttest scores were included in this comparison. The mean gain in levels was 2.4 for grade 2, compared with 1.1 for grade 1, and 1.9 for grade 3. The mean gain in stages was 0.5 for grade 2 and 0.2 for grades 1 and 3. Table 1

shows the minimum, maximum, and mean gains for DRA levels and stages by grade for all students with valid pre- and posttest scores.

Table 1: Minimum, Maximum, and Mean Gains for DRA Levels and Stages by Grade for All Students with Valid DRA Pre- and Posttest Scores

Grade	Number	Minimum Gain Level	Maximum Gain Level	Mean Gain Level	Minimum Gain Stage	Maximum Gain Stage	Mean Gain Stage
1	92	0	4.0	1.1	0	1.0	.2
2	133	0	10.0	2.4	0	2.0	.5
3	141	0	8.0	1.9	0	2.0	.2

Days in Attendance – 17+

To determine the effect of attendance on reading gains, the gains for students with 17 or more days in attendance were compared with gains for all students. By examining Table 2, it can be seen that attending at least 17 days of the S.O.A.R. program had a positive effect on student gains. When looking at all students, regardless of the number of days of attendance, the average gain in level was 1.9, compared with an average gain of 2.03 levels for students who attended at least 17 days. A similar pattern can be seen when examining average stage gains. However, because the average attendance rate overall was 16.3 days, the achievement differences between all students and those with at least 17 days of attendance would be expected to be similar.

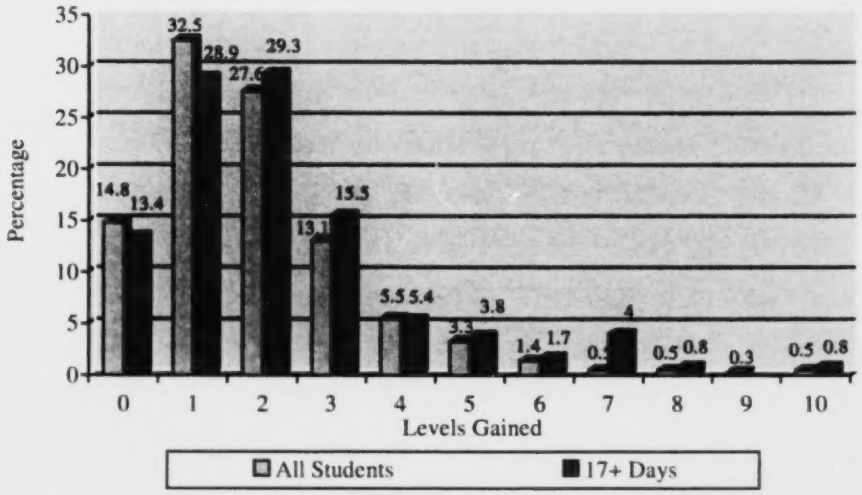
Table 2: Mean Level and Stage Gains for All Students in Attendance and for Students with 17+ Days in Attendance

	All	17+ Days
Mean Level Gain	1.9	2.03
Mean Stage Gain	0.32	0.35

Increase in Levels

When gains are compared for the percentage of students with 17+ days in attendance and for all students making gains, the 0 and 1 level gains are higher for all students than for those that attended 17+ days. Conversely, there is a higher percentage of 17+ students making 3-4 level gains on the DRA. Gains of 4-10 levels are similar. Figure 5 shows the percentage of all students and students with 17+ days in attendance that made gains of 0-10 levels on the DRA.

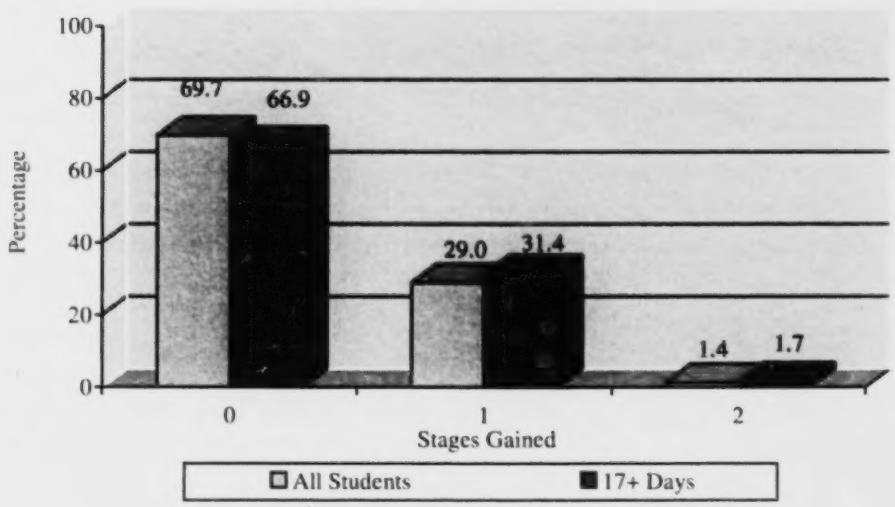
Figure 5: Percentage of All Students and Students with 17+ Days in Attendance That Made Gains of 0-10 Levels on the DRA



Increase in Stages

A stage consists of several levels of books. To move from one stage to another (emergent, early, transitional, and extending) is more difficult for students than it is to move from one level to another. The majority of students made no advancement to the next stage of literacy according to the DRA. A higher percentage of students who attended for 17+ days had one and two stage gains during the S.O.A.R. program. Figure 6 shows the percentage of all students and students with 17+ days in attendance that made gains of 0-2 stages on the DRA.

Figure 6: Percentage of All Students and Students with 17+ Days in Attendance That Made Gains of 0-2 Stages on the DRA



Qualitative Data

Qualitative information is important to this evaluation because new approaches to reading were implemented in this summer school program. Teachers and principals who worked with the balanced literacy framework were thought to have valuable information to share. This section will include information obtained from the teacher survey and interviews, principal interviews, and comments from the S.O.A.R. project director and curriculum specialist.

Teacher Survey

Teachers at each of the S.O.A.R. sites were invited to respond to a multiple-choice survey about the S.O.A.R. program and the balanced literacy approach for teaching reading. A total of 45 teachers and librarians responded to the survey. In general, teachers were very positive about the program. Jordan teachers were less confident about the training they received on the DRA than Oak Springs and Palm teachers, but were more positive about the effectiveness of the DRA as an assessment tool for S.O.A.R. The two survey questions with the strongest overall agreement showed the teachers' support for the balanced literacy approach to reading and their willingness to use the strategies learned from the program when they return to their regular campuses. Table 3 shows the mean responses to the teacher survey by campus and across the three campuses.

Table 3: Mean Responses to S.O.A.R. Teacher Survey by Campus and Across Campuses

Survey Questions	Jordan (n=17)	Oak Springs (n=13)	Palm (n=15)	All (n=45)
The staff development I received adequately prepared me to teach in the S.O.A.R. program.	3.4	4.7	3.9	3.9
I received enough information during training to feel confident that I administered the Developmental Reading Assessment correctly in my classroom.	3.2	4.5	4.1	3.9
I feel that the Developmental Reading Assessment was a good instrument to measure growth during the S.O.A.R.	4.1	3.9	3.8	3.9
The daily schedule contained an adequate mix of activities to keep all students engaged academically throughout the day.	3.6	4.5	3.8	3.9
The daily schedule and the curriculum worked together to help ensure that student progress was achieved in the S.O.A.R. program.	4.2	4.6	3.9	4.2
I feel that a balanced reading program provides useful instructional strategies to accelerate the literacy learning of students.	4.6	4.8	4.9	4.8
I will use strategies and/or materials from the S.O.A.R. program in my regular classroom next year.	4.5	4.8	4.5	4.6

Note: Scale is as follows: 5=Strongly Agree; 4= Agree; 3=Unsure; 2=Disagree; and 1=Strongly Disagree

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Teacher Interviews

Three teachers at each of the campuses were asked to participate in an interview about the S.O.A.R. program with a member of the evaluation staff. Teachers were asked to respond to questions about the training, daily schedule, materials, and assessment. In order to improve the program for next year, teachers were asked to give suggestions that might make S.O.A.R. a more meaningful experience for participants. Additional information was obtained from the comment section of the multiple-choice survey. Teachers' comments are included in the following paragraphs.

Training and Preparation

While teachers generally agreed that the training for S.O.A.R. was beneficial, many of the teachers expressed a desire for additional information. More sessions on guided reading, running records, structuring and providing materials for centers, and writer's workshop for the emergent reader were suggested as possible topics for future training.

Some of the first-grade teachers commented that they felt that the training pertained to older students. One teacher stated that *"grade-level breakout at the training would be helpful for teachers to see what the program would look like at their particular level."* Orientation with the books at the training would be beneficial before going to the campus, reported several of the teachers.

Two of the teachers interviewed had just completed their first year of teaching and both agreed that the balanced literacy training *"would have made the first year go much smoother."* Another teacher commented that this workshop was more effective than previous training because of the immediate use of information after training and the debriefing sessions.

Daily Schedule

The teachers from Oak Springs who were interviewed said that the schedule worked well in their classrooms. According to a third-grade teacher, *"The schedule provides clear directions. Everyone knows where to go, at what time, and what to expect."* (See Appendix C for a copy of the S.O.A.R. schedule.)

The daily schedule for S.O.A.R. was academically challenging – 3 1/2 hours with no breaks. Many of the teachers felt that children needed some time to *"move and burn off energy."* One teacher wrote, *"A time for children to have a short break would be beneficial to the children to aid their ability to focus."* Another teacher reported that she used gross motor activities to release energy. Some modifications to the schedule by some teachers interviewed included adjusting the schedule somewhat by reducing the time for the guided reading, rearranging the order of components, breaking the writer's workshop into shorter segments, or letting children choose free centers instead of assigning centers.

At least once each week, teachers met with Kathryn McKenzie, the curriculum specialist, to address questions about the balanced literacy approach. Ms. McKenzie observed in classrooms and gave teachers feedback about ways to enhance the program with their students. The planning and debriefing time on other days was used for grade-level or other meetings. A few of the teachers commented that the debriefing time took away from their planning time.

Materials

Each grade level at each of the S.O.A.R. campuses was provided reading materials to share. Each teacher also received consumable supplies to use in the classroom. For a complete list of S.O.A.R. materials, see Appendix D.

The teachers were generally pleased with the amount and quality of materials available to them for teaching reading. One teacher at Oak Springs stated that *"It is wonderful to have all the materials you need. I can't describe the feeling."* However, some first-grade teachers said that there were not enough materials to promote phonemic awareness skills for non-readers. Several teachers suggested the addition of supplemental materials such as magnetic letters and dry erase boards for every student. One teacher commented that *"students still needing letter/sound knowledge and who have very short memory recall need activities to help auditory and visual perception."* A common feeling was expressed by one teacher – *"Every classroom in AISD should be able to have access to these kinds of materials."* Teachers expressed regret that they would not have materials like these when they return to their campus.

Assessment

The Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) was used as a pre- and posttest for the summer program. Teacher training with the new assessment was provided by a representative of Celebration Press, the instrument's publisher, during a three-hour session at the S.O.A.R. staff development.

The pre-assessment was reported to be extremely time-consuming for teachers. The time involved varied from 10 minutes per student at grade 1 to 25-30 minutes at grades 2-3. While some classes only required two days of assessment time, other teachers reported taking the entire first week to complete the assessments. During a school year, the test publisher suggests that teachers complete two assessments per day with the entire process taking three-four weeks.

Because it was assumed that students who enrolled in the program were below grade level, some teachers reported starting too low on the assessment for some of the students. One teacher said that the assessment helped her to determine the reading level of her third-grade students who ranged from level 6 to level 44 (the highest). Some students who were assessed did not require remediation. One teacher stated that the program's organizers should stress eligibility criteria if the program is used next summer.

Some concern was expressed about the ability to show growth at the lower levels using this assessment tool. A teacher stated that the DRA *"was a good measurement tool for those students who were ready to start learning reading strategies."* However, she said, those students who were very low and did not know letters or sounds and who had not been exposed to this before did not show advancement on the DRA tool. *"They did make advances and there was no assessment tool to show that growth."* Growth for the non-readers might be expressed in an anecdotal note, suggested another teacher. One teacher said that *"summer school is too short for the DRA to be an effective tool, but it could be in a regular school year."*

Many of the teachers suggested assessing students with the DRA prior to the beginning of summer school to *"maximize instruction time."* One teacher noted the merit of one assessment instrument for the district *"so that moves from one school to another in the district would be*

smooth for the students as well as immediate, accurate placement in reading by the receiving teacher." According to a third-grade teacher, *"The DRA is not easy, but it is a good tool."*

Attendance

Teachers reported that attendance varied each day. Some parents had childcare problems that kept students at home. Other difficulties for parents involved catching the bus (for students who were not used to riding a bus), summer travel, lack of medication for students, and other activities planned for the summer.

Several teachers suggested that a note might be given to parents at registration stressing attendance as very important to the effectiveness of the program. One teacher said, *"It would help to make attendance a requirement for participation."*

Challenges Faced

S.O.A.R. teachers were asked about the challenges they faced during the summer program. The following is a summary of the challenges they cited:

- attendance and "wiggly" students;
- correlating the DRA books to the Wright Group books;
- an ESL student who could only read and write Spanish;
- skill levels that were lower than materials purchased and the training provided; and
- behavior management.

Suggestions for Improving Summer Reading Program

Teachers said that they would use the skills learned in the S.O.A.R. program when they return to their regular classroom. As one teacher stated, *"The S.O.A.R. program has been an excellent program and very successful in my classroom."* The following suggestions for future programs were made by teachers during the interviews:

- include the Reading Recovery assessments for concepts of print and letter identification with the DRA for the first grade students;
- debrief by grade level;
- make the workshop specific to grade level;
- build more planning time into the schedule;
- provide more feedback about specific use of balanced literacy strategies;
- find more ways to keep students on task;
- recruit other volunteers for the classroom, especially those who are dedicated to coming several days each week;
- inform UT professors that the program is going on so they can encourage students to participate;
- let students and parents know what is expected in the way of attendance and behavior;
- plan time for assessment prior to beginning of the summer program;
- correlate books used (Rigby and Wright) to DRA and Reading Recovery levels;
- increase the length of time for the staff development;
- increase the program length to six weeks;
- have PALM data available before summer school begins;

- allow a 10-15 minute break during the morning; and
- use the Developmental Reading Assessment districtwide.

Effectiveness of the Balanced Literacy Program

All of the teachers interviewed believe that the balanced literacy program is an effective approach to teaching reading. One teacher said, *"Both the teacher and the student know where the student is at all times."*

The S.O.A.R. teachers indicated that student progress was evident in this summer program, although many of the teachers believed that one or two more weeks of instruction would have a significant effect on accelerating literacy. The kindergarten students moving into first grade showed progress in recognizing letters, directionality of print, tracking letters and sounds, recognition of words, and fluency in putting word strings together, according to first-grade teachers. At grades 2-3, teachers reported gains in reading achievement and self-esteem for most students.

Positive aspects of the S.O.A.R. program reported by teachers included the wide array of excellent materials, the dedicated staff, the low pupil-teacher ratio, improved student confidence in reading, and the overall learning experience that was provided. One teacher wrote, *"The program was extremely beneficial – especially for those students who need small group/one-on-one instruction. The students seemed to feel confident and safe which enhanced their learning styles."* Another teacher added that *"this would be a good program for all classrooms."*

Principal Interviews

The Title I evaluation staff interviewed the principals during the site visits that were conducted at each of the three S.O.A.R. campuses. A summary of the results of the principal interviews follows. Also included in this section are comments by the S.O.A.R. project director and curriculum specialist concerning suggestions for future summer programs.

Training and Preparation

In general, the site principals felt that adequate planning and preparation were provided for the teachers and themselves. However, teachers at one site were not able to get into their classrooms to set them up on the day set aside for these activities because the school was being painted. This resulted in teachers having to work over the weekend to organize their classrooms. Principals felt that at least an additional half day of paid preparation time for themselves and the teachers would have been useful.

When asked about the balanced literacy training that was provided to teachers, the principals agreed that the sessions were very valuable. Several principals commented that more modeling of classroom behavior would have been appreciated, especially if the participants could have experienced an actual school day in "real time." All agreed that the afternoon debriefing sessions were helpful for the teachers to work through problems encountered during the summer program.

Preregistration did not provide principals with a good estimate of the number of students they would be serving at their campuses. Part of the problem, according to the principals, was that information was not provided to parents in a timely manner, resulting in some parents making other

plans for their children. However, given the timeframe in which the summer program was organized for this pilot year, the principals understood the problems with notification. One principal noted that parents might have been more likely to send their children to S.O.A.R. if an Extend-a-Care program had been available in the afternoon.

Daily Operations

When asked about the logistics of running the summer program, the principals agreed that the first several days were *"busy."* There were some problems with the bus routes initially, primarily because the drivers were unfamiliar with the routes. Also, students who do not normally take buses attended S.O.A.R., so it took them a few days to adjust to the new experience. Two of the summer sites had additional programs operating simultaneously, and there were some mix-ups with students not knowing which program they should be attending. Again, problems were generally resolved within a few days.

According to the principals, teachers and students adapted well to the S.O.A.R. daily schedule. The program participants also like the half-day structure. However, one of the principals felt that the students, especially the youngest ones, would have benefited from *"a few minutes outside."*

In terms of daily attendance, all of the principals reported that this presented a challenge. The parent training specialist at each campus worked daily to follow up on student absences with a telephone call to the child's home. The principals indicated that they stressed the importance of regular attendance to the parents whenever possible through the phone calls, newsletters, and parent meetings. One of the principals noted that it would have been helpful *"to have attendance tied to the program."*

When asked about the challenges of using an unfamiliar facility, the principals reported dissimilar experiences. One reported that there were no problems and that the host principal had helped to ensure that the experience would be a smooth one. Another reported that there were some problems initially sharing space with staff from other programs operating at the facility. The third principal reported that there were many challenges associated with the facility, primarily because of renovations that were ongoing for the duration of the S.O.A.R. program. Better coordination between the host principal, the custodial staff, and the S.O.A. R. staff would have helped alleviate many inconveniences.

In terms of necessary accommodations for bilingual, special education, or high-achieving students, the principals reported that the teachers encountered few problems. For the most part, special education students were indistinguishable from other S.O.A.R. students, so few accommodations were necessary. One campus had several monolingual Spanish-speaking students enroll and the Spanish S.O.A.R. materials were too advanced for their skills, so other materials had to be used. One of the sites transferred several of their bilingual students to a bilingual summer school program that was operating at the facility to better meet the students' needs. All of the principals reported that higher-achieving students participated in literacy activities that better addressed their skill levels. In one case, more advanced students worked with the S.O.A.R. librarian, using materials tailored to their needs.

Materials

With a few exceptions (e.g., tape dispensers, tape recorders), the office supplies provided for the S.O.A.R. program were reported to be adequate at all sites. The principals all made favorable comments about the balanced literacy instructional materials purchased for the summer program, and one noted that it would be helpful to be able to use the materials during the regular school year. Two of the principals commented that there were not enough instructional materials for the lowest literacy levels, however.

When asked about the effectiveness of the DRA as an assessment tool, the principals generally agreed that it was a good choice. All felt that the assessment process improved as teachers became more familiar with the materials. One principal suggested that it would be helpful, if the materials are used again, *"to try to find a way for the assessment tools used in Rigby, Wright Group, Celebration Press, Reading Recovery, and Balanced Literacy to go on the same scale. If the district adopts this program they should be aware of the difference between the scales for Reading Recovery and DRA."*

Support Staff/Activities

Each S.O.A.R. site was assigned a parent training specialist, a nurse, a librarian, one secretary, and classroom monitors/teacher aides to assist with the summer program. One principal reported that the primary responsibility of the librarian was *"to place an appropriate level book into each child's hand."* In all cases, the librarians worked with the classroom teachers to enhance the students' learning experiences. The librarians frequently came into the classrooms and read aloud to students. In other cases, they worked with the higher-achieving students in literacy activities appropriate to the students' skill levels. The librarian at one site served as a resource for parents, helping them to select appropriate materials to check out of the school's library for use at home.

When asked specifically about parental involvement with S.O.A.R, all of the principals reported that the parent training specialist was a valuable asset to the program. Student attendance was monitored with the assistance of the parent training specialist at each site. One of the principals reported that a weekly newsletter was sent to parents to keep them informed about the progress of the program. All of the principals indicated that successful parent meetings had been conducted at each site. At one location, an introductory meeting was held to get to know the parents and to introduce word building to them. At another campus, an evening parent meeting was attended by over 60 people. This meeting was arranged like an open house, with student presentations and visits to the classrooms where teachers gave parents an overview of balanced literacy. At the third site, both morning and evening meetings were scheduled for the parents. According to the site principal, *"during the meetings we reinforce the need for children to read between the end of the S.O.A.R. program and the beginning of school. We also stress the ease, enjoyment and benefits of reading to your child."*

Program Feedback

The principals reported that they had received very positive feedback about the S.O.A.R. program from their teachers. According to one principal, the teachers *"feel the environment is sane, the materials are ample and the class size is just right."* However, it was noted that the

teachers expressed some concern about administering the DRA while students were still becoming familiar with the concept of working in centers.

When asked about implementing S.O.A.R. strategies during the regular school year, the principals expressed some concerns about how well this will work. The materials are expensive, according to one principal, so they would need to be purchased over time. Consequently, something like the S.O.A.R. program would need to be integrated slowly into the regular program. Another principal commented that it would be beneficial to train all teachers in the district in balanced literacy strategies. One of the site principals noted that *"after we go back to the world of 22 students in a class, we can talk about balanced literacy and centers in order to preserve these strategies, but I don't know how well it will work."*

Suggestions for Improving Summer Reading Program

The principals were asked if they had any suggestions for improving the summer school if the district used this plan next year. In comments similar to ones made by teachers, the principals said they would like to see the parents notified earlier about their child's involvement in the program. Two of the principals suggested that there should be time set aside at the beginning of the session for DRA assessments only. If necessary, *"add a week, or maybe just three days, to the schedule so that testing could be done and logistics worked out and still have 19 days to teach."* Another principal suggested that it would be helpful to provide a lead Balanced Literacy teacher to work with classroom teachers instead of the principal. *"Lead teachers can model techniques much better than principals. Principals are usually tied up in their specific areas, and sometimes cannot get back into the classroom mode."*

Two of the principals suggested that it would be useful to coordinate with other programs, such as Reading Is FUNdamental, to get books students can take home. One principal would like to arrange a field trip to a local bookstore at the end of the program so students could purchase a book of their own with funds donated by an adopter.

Several of the principals' suggestions were echoed by the S.O.A.R. project director and the curriculum specialist. They agreed that the program's timeline was *"rushed"* this year, and they would hope to *"communicate in a more timely manner to schools, principals, teachers, and parents"* if the summer program is organized for next year. According to Terry Ross, the project director, *"the timeline for S.O.A.R. was incredibly short, and we can certainly do a better job on that"* if the program is offered in the future. Ms. Ross and Kathryn McKenzie, the curriculum specialist, also recognized the difficulty of completing DRA assessments while the students are becoming familiar with classroom procedures, and suggested that either the assessments be completed prior to the start of the program or have summer school teachers work in teams until all of their students are assessed.

Regarding the recruitment of site principals for S.O.A.R., both the project director and the curriculum specialist would like to be more involved in the hiring process in the future. They indicated that the site principal positions should be posted and the applicants should be screened carefully for appropriate qualifications. The principal is a critical element in the success of any school program, and it is essential that the persons selected to head the S.O.A.R. program at each site should be knowledgeable in balanced literacy and the mechanics of running a school.

When asked about the hiring and training of teachers for S.O.A.R., Ms. Ross and Ms. McKenzie indicated that they would like to be more involved here as well. They would like to start with a cadre of trained teachers to team with new teachers if the program is offered next summer. Also, the training sessions should be longer to provide more in-depth coverage of critical balanced literacy concepts.

Finally, all of the individuals who were interviewed for this evaluation commented that the summer program should be extended in the future. Most of the people involved in S.O.A.R. felt that six weeks would be a more reasonable length for the program, and that 19 days was not adequate in many cases to cover all of the material and to make a significant difference in the reading skills of the participants.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This evaluation of S.O.A.R. has provided information on the participants in the summer reading program. A review of the literature related to reading instruction was presented, along with an overview of the evaluation methodology. This was followed by a discussion of the qualitative and quantitative data analyses that were undertaken for the evaluation. The information gained from interviews with principals and teachers was summarized, along with the results from teacher surveys. Student and teacher demographics were presented. Finally, achievement data from the Developmental Reading Assessment were analyzed.

Demographic and Achievement Data

Of the 388 students who attended at least five days of the S.O.A.R. program, 55% were male. Forty-seven percent of these students were Hispanic, 37% African American, and 16% were Anglo/Other. Students from 37 AISD schools and four private schools participated in the program. Twenty-five percent of the students will enter grade 1 in 1998-99, 37% grade 2, and 38% grade 3.

Forty-five teachers taught reading in the S.O.A.R. classrooms across the three campuses. Of these teachers, 57% were Anglo/Other, 23% were African American, and 20% were Hispanic. Only two of the 45 teachers were male. The majority of the teachers taught core academic subjects at the elementary level during the 1997-98 school year. As a group, the participating teachers had an average of 8.7 years of teaching experience with AISD.

During the four-week S.O.A.R. program, 85% of the participating students showed reading improvement by advancing one or more levels from pretest to posttest on the DRA, the assessment instrument used in the program. The average number of levels gained by students, regardless of the number of days of attendance, was 1.9, with a range from zero to 10 levels. Fifty-two students (13%) advanced from the lowest level on the pretest to a higher level on the posttest. In terms of advancement between stages on the DRA, 111 students moved one of more stages during the course of the summer program.

Attending at least 17 days of the S.O.A.R. program had a positive effect on student gains. When looking at all students, regardless of the number of days of attendance, the average gain in level was 1.9, compared with an average gain of 2.03 levels for students who attended at least 17 days. A similar pattern was seen in terms of the average stage gains. However, because the average attendance rate overall was 16.3 days, the achievement differences between all students and those with at least 17 days of attendance would be expected to be similar.

When scores were examined by grade, students at Grade 2 showed the greatest mean gain in both level and stage. The mean gain in levels was 2.4 and the mean gain in stages was 0.5 for grade 2.

Surveys and Interviews

As a result of the evaluation efforts, it was determined that the majority of the staff involved with S.O.A.R. was highly in favor of the program. Teachers expressed strong support for the balanced literacy approach to reading and indicated their willingness to use the strategies learned from the program when they return to their regular campuses. However, they did express

concern that suitable instructional materials were not available for students at the lowest literacy levels.

Principals indicated that there were some problems encountered with implementing the program initially, but these were generally resolved within a few days. In terms of the training provided to teachers, the principals agreed that the sessions were valuable but that more modeling of classroom behavior would have been helpful. The principals also indicated that they had received very positive feedback about the S.O.A.R. program from their teachers.

When asked about improving the summer reading program if it is offered again in AISD, teachers and principals made the following suggestions:

- Notify parents earlier about their child's involvement in the program.
- Extend the program to six weeks in length.
- Carefully monitor the enrollment process, stressing eligibility for the program and the importance of regular attendance.
- Organize the pretesting schedule so that it does not interrupt instructional time.
- Correlate the books used for the DRA with Reading Recovery levels.
- Start with a cadre of trained teachers to team with new teachers.

Recommendations

As a result of reviewing the evaluation findings, the following recommendations concerning the S.O.A.R. program are offered for consideration:

- Continue S.O.A.R. next summer, and incorporate elements of the balanced literacy approach into regular classroom teaching throughout the year.
- Lengthen the program to six weeks to maximize the benefits of instruction during the summer break.
- Maintain a low teacher-pupil ratio for the summer classes.
- Enforce a stricter enrollment policy for students, one that stresses the eligibility requirements for the program and the importance of daily attendance.
- Purchase additional materials that better meet the needs of pre-reading students.
- Increase the emphasis districtwide on balanced literacy as an approach to teaching reading by offering professional development for teachers.
- Recruit teachers for the summer program who are likely to use the balanced literacy training in their classrooms during the school year.
- Recruit site principals for the program who are knowledgeable in balanced literacy and the mechanics of running a school.
- Use S.O.A.R. teachers to train other teachers in balanced reading so they can use the strategies in their classrooms.
- Increase the length of the training required of teachers before the summer program.
- Assess reading levels of program participants with the DRA before the summer program begins.
- Continue to monitor achievement in future summer programs.

APPENDICES

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Appendix A: Survey and Interview Instruments

S.O.A.R. Teacher Interview

1. *Did the schedule work for you or did you have to make adjustments?*

2. *Was the Developmental Reading Assessment a useful tool?*

3. *How long did the assessment process take?*

4. *Did you have enough materials for an effective program?*

5. *Have you previously used Reading Recovery strategies?*

6. *Did the training prepare you for the balanced literacy approach?*

7. *Was attendance a problem for any of your students?*

8. *What challenges have you encountered during this summer school program? Was debriefing helpful in addressing problems?*

9. *Do you feel that students are making progress during this 4-week period?*

10. *Do you think that this is an effective method for teaching literacy?*

11. *What skills and/or knowledge will you take back to your classroom from this program?*

12. *Do you have any suggestions for improving the summer school if the district uses this plan next year?*

S.O.A.R. Teacher Survey

1. The staff development I received adequately prepared me to teach in the S.O.A.R. program.

   a) Strongly Agree
   b) Agree
   c) Unsure
   d) Disagree
   e) Strongly Disagree

2. I received enough information during training to feel confident that I administered the Developmental Assessment System correctly in my classroom.

   a) Strongly Agree
   b) Agree
   c) Unsure
   d) Disagree
   e) Strongly Disagree

3. I feel that the Developmental Assessment System was a good instrument to measure student growth during the S.O.A.R. program.

   a) Strongly Agree
   b) Agree
   c) Unsure
   d) Disagree
   e) Strongly Disagree

4. The daily schedule contained an adequate mix of activities to keep all students engaged academically throughout the day.

   a) Strongly Agree
   b) Agree
   c) Unsure
   d) Disagree
   e) Strongly Disagree

5. The daily schedule and the curriculum worked together to help ensure that student progress was achieved in the S.O.A.R. program.

   a) Strongly Agree
   b) Agree
   c) Unsure
   d) Disagree
   e) Strongly Disagree

6. I feel that a balanced reading program provides useful instructional strategies to accelerate the literacy learning of students.

   a) Strongly Agree
   b) Agree
   c) Unsure
   d) Disagree
   e) Strongly Disagree

7. I will use strategies and/or materials from the S.O.A.R. program in my regular classroom next year.

   a) Strongly Agree
   b) Agree
   c) Unsure
   d) Disagree
   e) Strongly Disagree

S.O.A.R. Principal Interview

1. Do you feel that there was adequate planning and preparation time for yourself and your teachers before summer school began?

2. Did the logistics of breakfast, buses, and lunch work well at your school?

3. Did teachers and students adapt well to the schedule?

4. Was pre-registration a good indicator of the number of students participating in the program?

5. Were there problems with attendance? If so, how did you address the problems?

6. What were the challenges associated with using an unfamiliar facility?

7. Were there enough materials for all the classrooms? Did teachers use the materials effectively?

8. Do you think that the DRA was an effective assessment tool for this program?

9. Do you feel that teachers were adequately trained for the balanced literacy approach?

10. How did your campus use the librarian's services?

11. How did you involve parents with the summer program?

12. Did your teachers have to make accommodations for bilingual, special education , or high-achieving students? If so, what accommodations were made?

13. What kind of feedback have you received from teachers about the summer school program?

14. Could this program be successfully implemented during the regular school year? Will you encourage your staff to use any of these strategies?

15. Do you have any suggestions for improving the summer school if the district uses this plan next year?

Appendix B: Text Book Leveling Correlations

Grade Level (Basal)	Guided Reading Level (Fountas-Pinnell)	DRA Level (Joetta Beaver)	Stages of Reading
Kinder	A A B	1 2	Emergent
Pre-Primer	C D E	3 4 6-8	Early
Primer	F G	10 12	
1st Grade	H I		Transitional
2nd Grade	J-K L-M	18-20 24-28	
3rd Grade	N O-P	30 34-38	
4th Grade	Q-R	40	Extending
5th Grade		44	
6th Grade			

Note: From Joetta Beaver's Developmental Reading Assessment. Celebration Press.

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Appendix C: S.O.A.R. Daily Schedule

7:45-8:15	Breakfast
8:15-9:00	Opening Routines
	Calendar
	Shared Reading
	Shared Writing/Message of the day
9:00-10:30	Guided Reading/Centers
	Rotate among centers
	Each group lasts approximately 20-25 minutes
10:30-11:15	Writers' Workshop
11:15-11:30	Read Aloud
11:30-12:00	Lunch
12:00	Dismissal
12:15-1:15	Debrief/Planning

Appendix D: Summer School Materials List (per teacher)

GRADE 1

1 Letter Storage Box
1 Magnetic Marker Board
1 Set Magnetic Letters (uppercase)
1 Set Magnetic Letters (lowercase)
1 Kinderrimes Add-To-Package (Rigby)
1 Kindergarten Add-To-Pack (Rigby) – used for centers – reading/writing
1 Decodable Stories – Set A (Rigby) – *to be shared by first grade team*
1 Daily News Pocket Chart
1 Tape Recorder
2 Foundations Level 1, Sets A-D (Wright Group) – set of 64 books *to be divided among first grade teachers* – for independent reading
1 Shared Reading Value Set, Stage 1 (Rigby) – set includes 15 big books, 80 small books and 15 audiocassettes

GRADE 2

1 Letter Storage Box
1 Magnetic Marker Board
1 Set Magnetic Letters (uppercase)
1 Set Magnetic Letters (lowercase)
1 1st Grade Add-To-Pack (Rigby) used for centers – reading/writing
1 Daily News Pocket Chart
1 Tape Recorder
1 Decodable Stories – Set B/Set C (Rigby) – *to be shared by second grade team* – take home books
2 Foundations Level 1, Sets E-J (Wright Group) – six each of 104 pupil books *to be shared by second grade teachers* – for independent reading
1 Shared Reading Value Set – Stage 2 (Rigby) – set includes 15 big books, 80 small books and 15 audiocassettes
1 Shared Reading Value Set – Stage 3 (Rigby) – set includes 15 big books, 80 small books and 15 audiocassettes

GRADE 3

1 Letter Storage Box
1 Magnetic Marker Board
1 Set Magnetic Letters (uppercase)
1 Set Magnetic Letters (lowercase)
1 Daily News Pocket Chart
1 Tape Recorder
1 Worlds of Poetry Library (Sadlier-Oxford)
1 Second Grade Add-To-Pack (Rigby) – used for centers – reading/writing
1 Decodable Stories – Set C/D (Rigby) – *to be shared by third grade team* – take home books – decodable blackline masters
2 Foundations Levels 2-5 (Wright Group) – six each of 69 pupil books *to be shared by third grade teachers* – for independent Reading
1 Shared Reading Value Set – Stage 4 (Rigby) – set includes 15 big books, 80 small books and 15 audiocassettes
1 Shared Reading Value Set – Stage 5 (Rigby) – set includes 15 big books, 80 small books and 15 audiocassettes

* 10 sets of Developmental Reading Assessment Packages were ordered for each campus – to be divided between grade levels

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